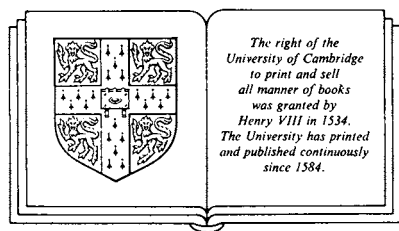


THE IMMORTAL  
✻  
EMPEROR

The life and legend of  
Constantine Palaiologos,  
last Emperor of the Romans

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## I \* THE DWINDLING EMPIRE

On the night of 2 March 1354 the coast of Thrace to the west of Constantinople was devastated by an earthquake. Some places disappeared into the ground. Some were completely destroyed and depopulated. Others were left defenceless by the collapse of their walls. The survivors fled from their shattered homes looking for refuge in the towns that had been spared. The earthquake was followed by blizzards and torrents of rain. Many of the refugees, especially the women and children, died of exposure. Many more were taken captive by the Ottoman Turkish soldiers who descended on the ruins at break of day. Gallipoli, the largest town in the district, was laid low, though its people managed to get away by sea.<sup>1</sup> The Turks were familiar with the area. For some years they had been employed as mercenaries in the conflicts that raged over the throne or the trade of the Byzantine Empire. They could easily be summoned across the Hellespont from Asia Minor, which they already controlled; and they could usually be relied upon to go home with their pay and their booty at the end of each campaign. The Byzantine Emperor John VI Cantacuzene believed that he enjoyed a special relationship with their leader Orhan, the son of Osman, the founder of the Osmanli or Ottoman people. In 1348 he had given his daughter as wife to Orhan, as though to demonstrate that symbiosis between Turks and Greeks was possible and that the world could be shared between a Muslim Asia and a Christian Europe.

It was perhaps a naive conception, based on a personal friendship. Orhan was a man of his word. His son Suleiman did not subscribe to gentlemen's agreements about the partition of the world. In 1352 some of Suleiman's troops, supposedly in the pay of the Byzantine Emperor, had occupied a fortress near Gallipoli.

<sup>1</sup> John Kantakouzenos (Cantacuzenus), *Historiae*, ed. L. Schopen, III (Bonn, 1832), pp. 298-9; Nikephoros Gregoras, *Byzantina Historia*, ed. L. Schopen, III (Bonn, 1855), pp. 220-2. Schreiner, *Chron. brev.*, II, pp. 283-4.

When the fighting was over they refused to go home, claiming possession of the fortress by right of conquest. It was the first permanent settlement by the Ottoman Turks on European soil. The earthquake two years later gave them the chance to expand and consolidate it. Suleiman crossed the straits from the coast of Asia Minor and occupied the ruins of Gallipoli. He brought with him a great crowd of soldiers and Turkish immigrants to repair and inhabit the deserted towns and villages. A Turkish garrison was installed in Gallipoli and the city was repopulated by Muslims. Gallipoli controlled the sea passage over the Hellespont from Asia to Europe. Legend had it in later years that Suleiman had seen the way across lit up for him by a moonbeam on the water. Once they were in possession of Gallipoli the Ottoman Turks would never go home. The way into Europe was open to them. The year 1354 marks the point of no return for the Christian Roman or Byzantine Empire. By 1405, only fifty years later, Suleiman's successors were masters of Bulgaria, Serbia, Macedonia, Thessaly and most of central Greece. The Byzantine Empire was reduced to the city and suburbs of Constantinople, parts of the Peloponnese, a few of the Greek islands and whatever else the Turks would allow them; for their emperors were obliged to pay tribute to the Ottoman Sultans and to serve as their vassals.<sup>2</sup>

It was in 1405, on 8 February, that Constantine Palaiologos was born. He was the fourth of the seven sons of the Emperor Manuel II who had come to this throne in 1391.<sup>3</sup> Manuel Palaiologos ruled over a dwindling and disintegrating empire. The great trunk of the tree of Constantinople, where its first seed had been planted, seemed to be hollow and bending in the cold wind blowing from the east. One of its younger branches, however, was still flourishing. In 1349 the Emperor John Cantacuzene, the friend and father-in-law of Orhan, had invested his son Manuel with the imperial title of Despot and sent him to take charge of the Byzantine province of the Peloponnese or the Morea, as it had come to be called. Central and southern Greece had been in foreign hands ever since the Fourth Crusade in 1204. The crusaders on their career of conquest had set up a French Duchy of Athens and

<sup>2</sup> D. M. Nicol, *The Last Centuries of Byzantium, 1261-1453* (London, 1972), pp. 249-50.

<sup>3</sup> J. W. Barker, *Manuel II Palaeologus 1391-1425* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1969), pp. 494-5. PLP, IX, no. 21500.

a French Principality of Achaia in the Morea. The nationality of their rulers changed more than once over the years. But to the native Greeks they were all foreigners. The merchants of Venice reaped most of the material profits from occupied Greece through their commercial colonies in the islands and their harbours on the mainland. Little by little, however, the Byzantines were able to win back long lost territory as the Principality of Achaia became enfeebled through lack of recruits and maladministration. Manuel Cantacuzene served as Despot in the Morea for over thirty years. He was a talented soldier, governor and statesman; and under his regime the province prospered and grew at the expense of its foreign neighbours. Its capital was at Mistra, whose romantic and haunting ruins still look down from a spur of Mount Taygetos on to the plain of Sparta. When Manuel died in 1380 it passed from the family of Cantacuzene to the then ruling house of Palaiologos, first to Theodore, son of the Emperor John V, then in 1407 to Theodore II, son of the Emperor Manuel II and elder brother of Constantine Palaiologos. Each bore the grand title of Despot which only a reigning emperor could confer; and their province came to be known as the Despotate of the Morea.<sup>4</sup>

Towards the end of the thirteenth century the Empress Yolande of Montferrat had proposed to her husband Andronikos II that he should adopt the western practice of partitioning his dominions among his sons and stepsons. The Emperor was shocked. He protested that the single monarchy of the Roman Empire could never be split and turned into a polyarchy.<sup>5</sup> The days of such conscientious adherence to Byzantine tradition were long over by the beginning of the fifteenth century. Succeeding emperors had come to feel that the only way to hold together the scattered fragments of their empire was to keep them in the family by allotting towns and provinces to their sons to govern and defend,

<sup>4</sup> For the history of the Despotate of the Morea in general, see: D. A. Zakythinos, *Le Despotat grec de Morée*, I: *Histoire politique*; II: *Vie et Institutions*, ed. Chryssa Maltézou (London, 1975); S. Runciman, *Mistra. Byzantine Capital of the Peloponnese* (London, 1980); I. P. Medvedev, *Mistra. Očerki istorii i kultury pozdnevizantiskogo goroda* (Leningrad, 1970). On Manuel Cantacuzene: D. M. Nicol, *The Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos (Cantacuzenus) ca. 1100–1460* (Washington, D.C., 1968), no. 25.

<sup>5</sup> Pseudo-Phrantzes, *Chronicon maius*, ed. V. Grecu, *Georgios Sphrantzes, Memorii 1401–1477: in anexă Pseudo-Phrantzes: Macarie Melissenos Cronica 1258–1481* (Bucharest, 1966), p. 172. (Cited as Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus* and Phrantzes, *Chron. maius*).



granting to each the title of Despot. Manuel II was blessed with a rich progeny of sons. One of them, Michael, died in 1406, so that their number was reduced to six. His eldest son John was designated to succeed him as emperor. His second son Theodore was appointed Despot in the Morea. His third son Andronikos was nominated as Despot at Thessalonica in 1408, when he was barely eight years old. There was not much more territory to be apportioned. When his fourth son Constantine was born therefore, in 1405, Manuel kept him in Constantinople until a suitable appanage became available.<sup>6</sup>

Little is known about Constantine's childhood and early years. He was devoted to his mother Helena, the daughter of a Serbian prince, Constantine Dragaš. He was frequently described as Porphyrogenitus, implying that he had been born in the purple chamber of the palace. It was a distinction shared by his elder brother Theodore and his younger brothers Demetrios and Thomas though not, it seems, by the eldest of the family, the future Emperor John VIII. While he was still young Constantine won the almost slavish devotion and admiration of the later historian, George Sphrantzes, whose memoirs are a unique and detailed source for Constantine's career. Sphrantzes, who came from the Morea, served at the court of Manuel II. His uncle was Constantine's tutor. His cousins were Constantine's companions, friends and attendants. When John VIII came to the throne he was at first reluctant to grant Constantine's request that Sphrantzes should enter his service; for he was too valuable as an imperial ambassador, diplomat and counsellor in Constantinople.<sup>7</sup> Constantine got on well with his elder brother and he had his way in the end. His relations with his younger brothers, Demetrios, born in 1406, and Thomas, born in 1409, were less friendly. One of Constantine's encomiasts in later years makes passing reference to his youthful expertise in hunting, horsemanship and the martial arts; and there is testimony enough for his adventurous spirit, vitality and courage.<sup>8</sup> He may have inherited something of the commanding presence and character of his father Manuel which so

<sup>6</sup> Manuel also had a son called Constantine who died in infancy before 1405. Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, p. 4; *PLP*, IX, no. 20491.

<sup>7</sup> Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, pp. 22-4.

<sup>8</sup> John Dokeianos, *Encomium* of the Emperor Constantine Palaiologos, ed. Lambros, *PP*, I, pp. 221-31, especially p. 227.

impressed those who met him on his travels in western Europe. No contemporary portraits of him survive, except for those on his few coins and seals; and these smudged and stylised effigies do not give him the fine features of his brother John as portrayed by the Italian artists who saw him.<sup>9</sup>

Constantine was born into a world whose ruling class was surprisingly multi-racial. It was a society constantly under threat of extinction. Inter-marriage among its leaders was a means of survival. His grandfather, the Emperor John V Palaiologos (1354–91), was the son of an Italian princess, Anne of Savoy. His uncle, the Emperor Andronikos IV, had married into the Bulgarian royal family. His uncle Theodore I, Despot of Mistra, had married a daughter of the Florentine Duke of Athens, Nerio Acciajuoli. His aunt Eirene had married Halil, son of the Turkish emir Orhan. His cousin who reigned briefly as John VII had married a lady of the Genoese family of Gattilusio. His brother John VIII was to marry first Anna, daughter of Vasili of Moscow, then Sophia of Montferrat, and third Maria, daughter of Alexios IV Komnenos, Emperor of Trebizond. His younger brother Theodore II, Despot of Mistra, married Cleope Malatesta, daughter of Carlo Malatesta, Count of Rimini. Constantine himself married twice and both of his wives were Italian. As the child of a Serbian mother and a half-Italian father, it is hard to describe Constantine as a Greek. Like most of his Greek-speaking contemporaries he thought of himself as a Roman, a *Romaïos* or Byzantine.

He was seventeen years of age when, in June 1422, the Ottoman Sultan Murad II laid siege to Constantinople. The Byzantines had enjoyed a long respite from Turkish aggression. The Emperor Manuel II had got on well with the previous Sultan Mehmed I. Mehmed died in 1421 and it at once became clear that the respite was at an end. The Turkish siege was long and bitter. The defence of the city was mainly directed by John VIII, who had recently been crowned as co-Emperor with his father and heir apparent. Thanks to his vigilance the Turks withdrew before the year was out. But the experience proved too much for the elderly Emperor Manuel. In September 1422 he suffered a stroke which paralysed one side of his body. Although he was to linger on for nearly three years, the government of Constantinople was effectively in the

<sup>9</sup> On the coins and seals of Constantine, see below pp. 70–2.

hands of his eldest son John. The outlook was dismal. The city of Thessalonica was also under siege by the Turks. Manuel's son Andronikos, who had been given charge of it as Despot, was young and in poor health. In the summer of 1423, with his father's consent, he offered Thessalonica to the Venetians; and in September the city changed hands and became the largest and, it was hoped, the most lucrative of all the Venetian colonies in Greece.<sup>10</sup>

The Emperor John VIII felt that the time had come to look for help from the western Christian world, as his father had done some twenty years before, without much success. In November 1423 he set out for Venice and Hungary. He nominated his brother Constantine as regent in Constantinople until he came back. Constantine was still young. It was his first taste of authority and he was given the title of Despot to go with it.<sup>11</sup> He had his bedridden father, the old Emperor Manuel, at hand to advise him; and, after a few false starts, they arranged a new peace treaty with the Sultan Murad. It was a humiliating arrangement. But it meant that the city of Constantinople was, for a while, spared further onslaughts from the Turks. It was signed on 22 February 1424.<sup>12</sup> By all accounts Constantine discharged his duties as regent with dignity and success. His brother John returned from his travels in Italy and Hungary at the beginning of November 1424. He had gained little. The Catholic King of Hungary had piously advised him that his chances of securing aid from western Christendom would be much enhanced if he and his people would swear obedience to the pope and unite with the church of Rome. The suggestion was far from new. John's father Manuel had heard it before. He had always dismissed it as a move likely to alarm and antagonise the Turks if not as a form of moral blackmail.<sup>13</sup>

Manuel died on 21 July 1425 at the age of seventy-five, having taken the monastic habit for his last few months. John VIII became Emperor in fact as well as in name. His brother, the Despot Constantine, must now be given an appanage to call his own. In their recent treaty the Turks had graciously allowed the Byzantines to retain as a fief a strip of land to the north of Constantinople. It

<sup>10</sup> Barker, *Manuel II*, pp. 361-71; Nicol, *Last Centuries of Byzantium*, pp. 346-51.

<sup>11</sup> Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, pp. 14-16.

<sup>12</sup> DR, v, nos. 3402-4.

<sup>13</sup> Barker, *Manuel II*, pp. 376-9.

ran along the Black Sea coast from the town of Mesembria in the north to Derkos in the south. It seems also to have included the port of Selymbria to the west of Constantinople. This was the area allotted to the Despot Constantine in 1425. In so far as it covered the northern approaches to Constantinople it was strategically important. But there was little that Constantine could have done if the Turks chose to break the terms of their treaty and relieve him of his fief.<sup>14</sup>

On his way to Venice in 1423 John VIII had broken his journey in the Morea. There he had words with his brother the Despot Theodore at Mistra. Theodore preferred the quiet life of scholarship to the stress of administration and warfare. Two years earlier he had gone through an arranged marriage with Cleope Malatesta from Rimini. It was at first an unhappy union and he expressed a deep desire to become a monk. He took the opportunity of his brother's visit to confide in him. When John returned to Constantinople he assumed that Theodore was still of the same mind. He therefore recalled Constantine from Mesembria and designated him to succeed his brother as Despot in the Morea. Constantine had proved his loyalty and ability in a number of ways. He would make an excellent governor at Mistra. Theodore, however, had by then changed his mind. Some of his admirers, notably his scholarly friend John Eugenikos, had applauded his intention to renounce the vainglory of this world in favour of the delights of the religious life. His more worldly friends, however, had persuaded him that the world had need of him. When the moment came, he declined to step down in favour of Constantine and patched up his differences with his wife. Theodore was to remain as Despot at Mistra for another twenty years. They were years of prosperity, not least in the cultural and intellectual life of the province. Under Theodore's patronage scholars and philosophers gathered at the court at Mistra. Cleope Malatesta came to share and to encourage her husband's scholarly taste; and he was desolated when she died in 1433, for he had come to love her dearly.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, p. 18. Doukas (Ducas), *Istoria Turco-Bizantină (1341-1462)*, ed. V. Grecu (Bucharest, 1958), pp. 237, 245. Schreiner, *Chron. brev.*, II, pp. 429-30. DR, V, no. 3414.

<sup>15</sup> John Eugenikos, *Advice to the Despot Theodore*, ed. Lambros, PP, I, 67-111.

Constantine was thus thwarted of his chance to become Despot at Mistra. After his father's death, however, John VIII as Emperor devised a plan for using Constantine's talents to better purpose. He could have a separate appanage in the Morea to call his own. It was evident that Theodore, happy though he was in his domain at Mistra, was not the most practical of men and could benefit from some assistance and support. In 1423 the Turks had broken through the defensive wall across the Isthmus of Corinth which Manuel II had built to keep them out. They had invaded and devastated the Morea. Shortly before, the Italian ruler of Epiros and the offshore island of Cephalonia, Carlo Tocco, had occupied Clarentza and the plain of Elis on the north-western side of the peninsula. Theodore arranged a truce with him but it was broken in 1426 and Tocco resumed his campaign. The Emperor John determined to rid the Morea of this nuisance. In 1427 he set out from Constantinople to take personal charge of the matter. He took his brother Constantine with him and also George Sphrantzes. It was then that Sphrantzes formally entered the service of Constantine. They reached Mistra on 26 December and made straight for Clarentza to lay siege to it by land and sea. In a naval skirmish in the nearby Echinades islands Carlo Tocco's ships were sunk and he accepted defeat. He agreed to relinquish his recent conquests; but he hit on a plan to save what was left of his dignity. He offered his young niece, Maddalena, in marriage to the Emperor's brother Constantine, presenting him with Clarentza and Elis as her dowry. It was an amicable arrangement that suited both parties. On 1 May 1428 Clarentza was handed over and on 1 July Constantine was married to Maddalena Tocco in a ceremony near Patras. She took the more familiar Greek name of Theodora; and her uncle Carlo Tocco sailed away to his domains in Epiros.<sup>16</sup>

A curious letter in verse was addressed to the Despot Constantine before his wedding. Its anonymous author, claiming to be divinely inspired, congratulated the Emperor on his victory but warned Constantine against marrying the niece of Carlo

<sup>16</sup> Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, pp. 20-4; Chalkokondyles, ed. E. Darkò, *Laonici Chalcandylae Historiarum Demonstrationes*, I (Budapest, 1922), pp. 17-19; Schreiner, *Chron. brev.*, II, pp. 435-6. Zakythinos, *Despotat grec de Morée*, I, pp. 196-201, 204-5; D. M. Nicol, *The Despotate of Epiros, 1267-1479* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 190-2.

Tocco. The Tocco family were not to be trusted.<sup>17</sup> It may have been sound advice, though not for the reasons given. For the appointment of Constantine as a second Despot in the Morea, with or without his Italian wife, affected the system of government and was to lead to trouble in the future. Until 1428 the Despotate had been governed by one scion of the imperial family appointed by the Emperor in Constantinople. Now there were to be two, and before long three. The third was to be Constantine's youngest brother Thomas, who had been brought up at Mistra. In theory the Despotate remained one and undivided. But in practice, as was soon to be proved, the central authority, which had worked well in the fourteenth century, broke down and the Byzantine province of the Morea disintegrated into separate and often warring principalities.<sup>18</sup> Theodore had declined to make way for his brother at Mistra. But he was persuaded to surrender a generous part of his allotted territory, including the harbour town of Vostitza (Aigion) on the northern coast of the Morea, several towns and fortresses in Lakonia, as well as Kalamata and Messenia on the western side of the peninsula. His young brother Thomas was given the castle of Kalavryta to the north of Mistra. Constantine at first based himself on Clarentza, to which he was entitled by conquest as well as by marriage. The Emperor should have known his brothers better than to suppose that they would collaborate. For they were a contentious brood.<sup>19</sup>

While he was still with them, however, Constantine persuaded him that Clarentza was well placed for attacking and capturing the flourishing commercial and strategic port of Patras not far away. Patras had changed hands several times. In 1428 it was governed by its Latin Archbishop, Pandolfo Malatesta, whom the pope had appointed four years before, although the Turks claimed it as a fief and the Venetians had a proprietary interest in it as a market. It was they who alerted the pope to the danger facing the city in 1428. In July the three brothers John, Constantine and Thomas joined forces in an assault on Patras. It was the young Thomas's first experience of war. They failed to take the city and withdrew once the defenders had agreed to pay Constantine an annual tribute of

<sup>17</sup> Anonymous letter in verse to the Despot Constantine in Achaia, ed. Lambros, *PP*, IV, pp. 88–9.

<sup>18</sup> Zakythinos, *Despotat*, II, p. 81.

<sup>19</sup> Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, p. 26. Zakythinos, *Despotat*, I, p. 206.

500 gold coins. According to George Sphrantzes, who was with them, the main cause of their failure was the reluctance of their brother, the Despot Theodore, to help them. He was still dithering about his monastic vocation. He must also have had it in mind, however, that the governor of Patras, the Archbishop Malatesta, was his brother-in-law. It would be injudicious to co-operate in his downfall. The pope was none too pleased with Cleope Malatesta in any case, for he had heard that she had gone over to the Orthodox church, perhaps to win the heart of her husband. Theodore therefore stayed at Mistra.<sup>20</sup>

It was time for the Emperor John to return to Constantinople. Before leaving, he summoned Constantine to Mistra for a conference. There Constantine and Sphrantzes met in secret and decided to make a second attempt to capture Patras. If they were successful Constantine would stay in the Morea. If they failed he would go back to his appanage on the Black Sea, while retaining possession of Clarentza and the other places in the Morea which had come to him as his wife's dowry. Sphrantzes describes what followed in great detail. He and Constantine marched from Vostitza along the coast, bypassing Patras, to reach Clarentza and Chloumoutsi, where Constantine's wife was staying. They were confident that the Greek inhabitants of Patras would support them. From Clarentza Constantine sent envoys to their leaders to prepare the way for his entry into the city. On 1 March 1429 he led his army towards Patras. The city fathers sent out a messenger who came back to report that Constantine meant to attack and capture the city and its castle. On 20 March, Palm Sunday, the attack was launched. It developed into a long siege punctuated by minor engagements, in one of which Constantine's horse was shot from under him and he was all but killed or captured. His friend Sphrantzes saved his life, though in doing so he himself was wounded and taken prisoner. He was released, more dead than alive, on 23 April. It was not until early in May that the defenders agreed to negotiate. Their Archbishop had gone to Italy to seek reinforcements. They promised that if he were not back by the end of the month they would surrender. Constantine and his troops withdrew, taking over the fortress of Saravalle as they went.

The Archbishop had not returned by the end of May. On 1 June Constantine came back and called upon the leading men of Patras

<sup>20</sup> Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, pp. 24–6. Zakythinios, *Despotat*, I, pp. 206–7.

to honour their agreement and surrender. Four days later they met in the cathedral of St Andrew, the city's patron saint, and resolved to accept Constantine as their lord. The city of Patras was thus added to his Despotate and there was no question of his leaving the Morea. The castle on the hill above the city, however, was held by the archbishop's men and did not give in for another twelve months. The surrender of Patras distressed the pope, annoyed the Venetians and, worst of all, angered the Turks. The Sultan Murad delivered an ultimatum. Sphrantzes, Constantine's dependable and faithful friend, who had spent forty days in a dungeon at Patras for his master's sake, was sent to pacify the Sultan and, after long talks with him and with Turahan, the Ottoman commander of Thessaly, averted the threat of Turkish reprisals. Constantine sent other ambassadors to mollify the pope and the Venetians. The negotiations took several months.

Sphrantzes, however, had got no further than the Venetian harbour of Naupaktos across the water from Patras when the dispossessed Archbishop Malatesta arrived there from Italy with some Catalan ships and soldiers. He had urged the Sultan to protest against the occupation of his archdiocese by the Greeks. It was too late. The unruly Catalans whom he had brought as a relief force showed little interest in recovering Patras, though they plundered the coast and stormed their way into Clarentza. Constantine was able to buy it back from them for 6,000 Venetian ducats. Later, however, he ordered that Clarentza be destroyed for fear of it falling into the hands of pirates. The archbishop died at Pesaro in Italy in 1441, still protesting that Patras was his and that it was the duty of all Christians in the west to help him win back the apostolic see of St Andrew. In the meantime the castle above Patras surrendered to Constantine in July 1430. The loyal Sphrantzes had his reward. In November he was appointed as the first Byzantine governor of the city now triumphantly restored to the empire after 225 years of foreign occupation.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, pp. 40–2; Phrantzes, *Chron. maius*, p. 268; Chalkokondyles, II, pp. 18–19; Schreiner, *Chron. brev.*, II, pp. 442–3. E. Gerland, *Neue Quellen zur Geschichte des lateinischen Erzbistums Patras* (Leipzig, 1903), pp. 64–9; Zakythinos, *Despotat*, I, pp. 207–9; II, p. 224; A. Bon, *La Morée franque*, I (Paris, 1969), p. 323; K. M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant (1204–1571)*, II: *The Fifteenth Century* (Philadelphia, 1978), pp. 31–5. See below, chapter 6, p. 99. The Spanish traveller Pero Tafur, sailing that way in 1436, reported that 'Florençia' (Clarentza) near Patras was 'a city of fine buildings but now depopulated'. *Andanças e Viajes de Pero Tafur por diversas partes del mundo avidos (1435–1439)* (Madrid, 1874), p. 44. The English



More triumphs followed. Constantine's brother Thomas, whose base was at Kalavryta, brought to an ignoble end the foreign Principality of Achaia which had endured under rulers of various nationalities since the Fourth Crusade in 1204. Its last prince was the Genoese Centurione Zaccaria who died, bereft of almost all his territory, in 1432. His daughter Caterina had married Thomas and brought him what was left of the Principality as her dowry.<sup>22</sup> The cause of western colonialism in the Morea had been dying for some years. The initiative of Constantine and his brothers, supported by the Emperor John VIII, relegated it to the history books. By 1430 nearly all of southern Greece had been cleared of foreign potentates and restored to Byzantine rule, except for the Venetian harbours and colonies at Argos, Nauplion, Modon and Coron. Constantine's successes compensated for the dreadful news coming to the Emperor from other quarters. In March 1430 the Sultan Murad put a bloody end to the Venetian regime in Thessalonica. It had lasted only for seven years. Thessalonica became Turkish. In October of the same year the city of Ioannina in the north-west of Greece submitted to the Turks. The Morea was once again Byzantine, but the whole of mainland Greece to the north of the Isthmus of Corinth was now in Turkish control.<sup>23</sup>

The Venetians were not enthusiastic about the revival of Greek fortunes in the Morea. They had lost face and a fortune of their own in the rash investment in Thessalonica. They must keep better hold on their properties in the south of Greece. There was mutual distrust between Greeks and Venetians. In an attempt to offset their influence on the economy of his Despotate, Constantine approached the commune of Ragusa (Dubrovnik), whose merchants were frequent visitors to his shores. The government of Ragusa was interested in securing trade concessions and drafted a formal agreement setting out their terms in a letter to Constantine in February 1431.<sup>24</sup> No such agreement seems to have been

translator of Tafur renders 'Florençia' as 'Corinth'. *Pero Tafur, Travels and Adventures, 1435-1439*, translated by M. Letts (London, 1926), p. 49.

<sup>22</sup> Zakythinos, *Despotat*, I, p. 209.

<sup>23</sup> Nicol, *Last Centuries of Byzantium*, pp. 367; Nicol, *Despotate of Epiros, 1267-1479*, pp. 200-3.

<sup>24</sup> The report of the mission of George Palaiologos Cantacuzene to Ragusa, addressed to 'the Despot of the Peloponnese' in February 1431, is in Lambros, *PP, II*, pp. 29-30. B. Krekić, *Dubrovnik (Raguse) et le Levant au Moyen Age* (Paris-La Haye, 1961), pp. 51-2 and no. 787; Nicol, *Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos*, no. 67.

concluded. But the fact that it was even proposed is another sign of the revived initiative of the Despotate of the Morea under Constantine's management. The Turks too were uneasy about the Byzantine revival in the Morea. In the spring of 1431 Turahan, the Sultan's general in Thessaly, took the precaution of sending troops south to demolish once again the wall across the Isthmus of Corinth. The Greeks must not be allowed to use its shelter to cover their rebellious activities. They must be reminded that they were the Sultan's vassals.<sup>25</sup>

It remained to be seen whether the often quarrelsome sons of the family of Palaiologos could build on their success and hold the Morea as an island of Christianity against the forces of Islam. Fate was unkind to the Despot Constantine. In November 1429, not long after his victory at Patras, his Italian wife Maddalena-Theodora died at Stameron in Elis. They had been married for less than eighteen months and he was grief-stricken. She was buried at Clarentza, though her remains were later moved to the church of the Life-Giving Christ (Zoodotos) at Mistra. Two of the scholarly literati of Mistra, John Eugenikos and Bessarion, Bishop of Nicaea, mourned the melancholy event in stylised epitaphs.<sup>26</sup> Some months later, perhaps because he wished to be nearer to Mistra, Constantine came to a new arrangement with his younger brother Thomas. The capital of Thomas's appanage was Kalavryta. In March 1432 he agreed with Constantine that they should exchange their territories. Constantine transferred his court to Kalavryta. Thomas moved to Elis. It was an amicable exchange and presumably had the approval of their brother, the Emperor John, and also of the senior of the three Despots in the Morea, Theodore, who still held sway at Mistra.<sup>27</sup>

The harmony between them all did not last long. It was bedevilled by the question of seniority among them. The Emperor John had married three times, but his marriages had produced no

<sup>25</sup> Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, p. 50; Schreiner, *Chron. brev.*, II, p. 444.

<sup>26</sup> John Eugenikos, ed. Lambros, *PP*, I, pp. 117–22; Bessarion, ed. Lambros, *PP*, IV, pp. 94–5. On the monastery of Christ Zoodotos at Mistra, see Zakythinos, *Despotat*, II, pp. 197, 298. On the site of her death (Stamiron, Stamira, not St Omer), see Bon, *La Morée franque*, I, pp. 293, 343 n. 1.

<sup>27</sup> Sphrantzes, *Chron. minus*, p. 50, reports that Thomas moved to Clarentza. But since Clarentza had already been demolished, it seems more probable that Thomas established himself at Patras, where he was to be found in 1435. Gerland, *Neue Quellen*, pp. 67–8, 218.